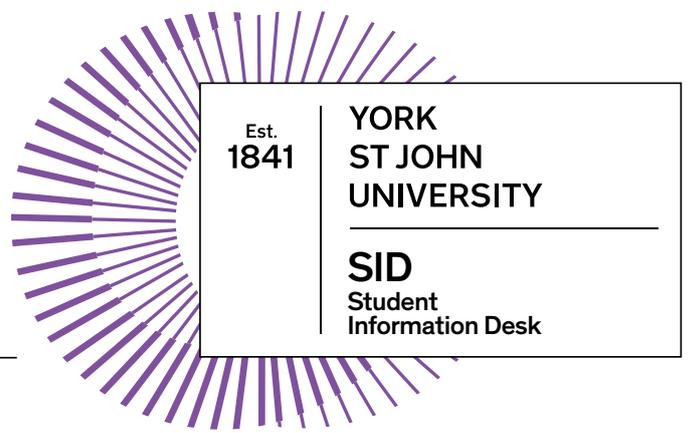


Reflective Writing



STUDENT SERVICES FACTSHEET

Practice-based programmes and professional development modules are often assessed through reflective assignments. Reflective journals and essays differ from traditional academic assignments in that they specifically ask you to discuss how your thinking and skills are developing. They give you a chance to reflect on your own learning, and relate your experiences to research and theories in your discipline. This factsheet offers a simple step-by-step guide to developing good reflective writing.

1. Keep a journal

- Write regularly throughout the process that you are expected to reflect on (placement, artistic process, group work, research etc.).
- Try to write every day if you can, and as soon as possible after the events.
- Don't forget to date your entries, to keep track of your progress. If you use a notebook, leave two or three blank pages after each entry, to add further reflections later.
- Focus on the key steps in the process, and on events that stand out.

2. Select key learning points to explore further

- Ask yourself: what are the most important things I've learnt, and how?
- Don't be afraid to discuss mistakes. A good reflection on less-than-perfect practice will show that you can think honestly and critically about your own performance.
- Consider which skills or aspects of your work you most want to develop, and why.

3. Select a model of reflection

Choose an established model such as Kolb, Gibbs, Johns, or the OT model of professional thinking. These models offer prompts and a structure for your writing.

4. Start writing and reflecting

Draft a brief description of the events, your thoughts at the time, and your reflections since. Bring in different perspectives, considering what other people involved or supervisors might say. Are you able to make generalisations about what went wrong or what went well? Can you connect them to any of the concepts studied on your course? What might you do in future?

Support

For reflective writing tips and resources, search 'reflective writing' in the Library Catalogue, or find Williams, Woolliams and Spiro (2012), *Reflective Writing*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small groups tutorials.

To book an appointment contact the Student Information Desk:

T: 01904 876477

E: SID@yorksja.ac.uk

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

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5. Research the academic literature

Just like with other academic assignments, you are expected to explore relevant academic sources. This is a great opportunity to find out what experts have said about the issues you're discussing, and what alternative practice they suggest.

6. Use the academic literature to reflect on your experience

- Explain the events through models, theories and research findings.
- Does the literature offer a consistent perspective, or are there different theories which you can compare and contrast?
- Explore any discrepancies between your experience and existing literature. How might you explain these differences?
- Use what the literature recommends as the basis for your action plan.

7. Revise your draft

The most common problems to look out for are:

- **Too much narrative:** keep descriptions of events down to a minimum. One or two sentences should be enough to set the scene.
- **Too little evidence of the effects of your practice:** e.g. don't just say 'my session was successful', but show how you made that assessment (e.g. 'my client's body language visibly relaxed'; 'all pupils were actively engaged').
- **Too little academic evidence:** include in-depth discussion of the literature, and relate it clearly to your experience.
- **No clear action plan:** make sure that you explain what you will do in future, and why.

Example of a reflective essay:

As a trainee coach, I noticed that the structure of the GROW model did not offer tools to facilitate the coachee in working out goals. In order to address this, Downey (2003) and Wilson (2011) have offered new models incorporating an exploratory stage prior to goal-setting. In practice, however, I have found that the ultimate focus on goals seems to restrict the scope of exploration. It could be argued that both Downey (2003) and Wilson (2011) have failed to question whether retaining goal-setting at the core of coaching is actually effective (Wilson, 2011; Boyatzis and Howard, 2013). Coaching psychologist Passmore has questioned the effectiveness of the GROW model because of its non-psychological nature. Passmore suggests that the acute goal-focused nature of the model may exclude the potential to explore philosophical aspects of the life of the coachee (Passmore, 2005). Psychodynamic coaching, by contrast, may better fulfill some coachees' need for a broader perspective on their lives.

- Brief description of the trigger for reflection
- Exploration of the literature addressing the issue
- Further personal reflection
- Critical discussion of the literature
- Possible alternative model to tackle initial issue